



## PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES UNDER THE BIG SKY

### BEING PREPARED FOR DIASERS AND EMERGENCIES

To encourage Americans to be safe and prepared and to emphasize the importance of being prepared, September has been designated **National Preparedness Month**. This is the month for Montanans to focus on activities to prepare for emergencies in their homes, businesses, and schools. This issue of *Montana Public Health* describes preparedness attitudes of Montanans and encourages health care providers to communicate preparedness messages to patients.

**Being Prepared** In 2002 the U.S. Congress passed the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Act in response to the anthrax attacks in 2001. Refinements to the act were made after hurricanes Rita and Katrina to promote response and readiness. The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) along with county and tribal health departments are working to help Montana prepare for health related emergencies. This preparation includes conducting surveillance, enhancing warning capacity, planning for preparedness, and obtaining and distributing grant funds. Encouraging individuals and institutions in Montana to prepare to cope with emergencies will also allow them to prevent or minimize negative health affects that may result from emergency events.

The government alone cannot be expected to stop or entirely mitigate health events, such as a pandemic of influenza, but individual efforts and community awareness can substantially increase the chance for effective control. Prevention is the ultimate goal in preparedness.

**Are Montanans Prepared?** In 2006, a dozen questions about household preparedness were included in the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS). Questions about preparedness will again be asked in 2008 to measure progress of preparedness programs, awareness, and training. Results from the 2006 survey indicated a moderate level of preparedness among Montana households. Fifty-six percent of Montanans considered themselves somewhat prepared for emergencies, but 17% considered themselves not prepared at all. Responses to other questions are shown on Table 1.

Most Montanans report that they plan to receive information related to disasters from television, and a substantial proportion plan to rely on radio. (Table 2) In order to take advantage of radio communication if electricity is interrupted, Montanans should include extra batteries in their emergency stores.

**Table 1: Preparedness plans of Montanans, 2006, BRFSS responses**

<u>Plan</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Have a three day supply of water	54
Have three-day supply of prescription meds (for persons with prescriptions)	78
Ready for mandatory evacuation if ordered	91
[Of those who said they would not evacuate if ordered, reasons included]	
Concerns for leaving property/pets	22
Lack of trust in public officials	16
Concern for safety	14

**Table 2: Anticipated source of disaster information, Montana, 2006, BRFSS responses**

<u>Source</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Television	62
Radio	20
Internet	4
Neighbors	4
Print media	1
Other	9

**Communicating Preparedness** In order to help people be prepared it is important to make preparedness language and concepts part of everyday life. There are many resources available to help schools, businesses, and households take steps to increase readiness for disaster or emergency situations. One of these resources is Ready.gov, a government website that offers checklists and instructions on preparedness. Other resources are listed on Table 3.

Preparedness and prevention should be discussed with patients in health care settings, and with students in school. Everyone should be encouraged to practice proper hygiene and to be prepared for disaster situations.

Encouraging emergency planning in businesses and organizations is also a way to bring preparedness to the forefront.

**Table 3: Emergency preparedness information sources available online**

<u>host agency</u>	<u>web site</u>
Homeland Security	<a href="http://www.ready.gov">http://www.ready.gov</a>
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	<a href="http://www.bt.cdc.gov/">http://www.bt.cdc.gov/</a>
Federal Emergency Management Agency	<a href="http://www.citizencorps.gov/">http://www.citizencorps.gov/</a>
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services	<a href="http://www.pandemicflu.gov/">http://www.pandemicflu.gov/</a>
Montana DPHHS	<a href="http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/pandemic.shtml">http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/pandemic.shtml</a>
Montana DPHHS	<a href="http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/PHSD/emergency-prepared/EMprep-index.shtml">http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/PHSD/emergency-prepared/EMprep-index.shtml</a>

## Recommendations: Making preparedness a household word

- Discuss emergency planning with at-risk patients to encourage individual preparedness and ensure that individuals arrange for assistance if they need it.
- Encourage all your patients/clients to be prepared for emergencies by maintaining a current list of medications (including dosage), allergies, doctors, and friends or relatives that can assist during a crisis.
- Encourage patients who take essential medicines to plan ahead when ordering refills so that they will always have a 3-day supply on hand
- Be familiar with your community disaster and emergency preparedness planning activities
- Be familiar with potential isolation, quarantine and shelter plans for your community
- Be aware of common public health threats, and discuss implications with at-risk patients

For more information, contact Luke Fortune, Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness & Training at 406-444-1281 or [lfortune@mt.gov](mailto:lfortune@mt.gov).

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